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ABSTRACT

As schools respond to higher expectations for student learning, school staffs are uniting around innovations that show the greatest promise for improving student learning. This paper examines one particular staff-development initiative, the Northwest Initiative for Teaching and Learning (NWIFTL), and the leadership actions that support and sustain the individual school-development projects. The NWIFTL is a partnership of four Seattle-area public-school districts, two universities, the state offices of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Commission on Student Learning, and the Stuart Foundation. The initiative funds modest staff-development projects in a total of 19 schools across the 4 partner-school districts. The report focuses on centers of leadership and asks whether these projects reflect traditional principal leadership, or whether they represent a new opportunity for others to participate in meaningful direction of professional development in schools. It draws from a study that used survey data and case studies to examine the partner schools. Findings show that all 17 of the responding schools had staff-development efforts under way. School-based plans were shaped by a combination of building, district, and state decisions and directives, and schools indicated that their NWIFTL projects were linked to many other staff-development efforts in the schools. Contains 20 references. (RJM)

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ENLARGING THE CIRCLE:
LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The challenge of achieving educational excellence in schools is compounded by the complex task of increasing the pedagogical expertise of teachers while simultaneously increasing their capacity for new roles in site-based decision making and the exercise of leadership in schools. These new capacities of expanded leadership and increased pedagogical expertise increasingly find root in the staff development opportunities that are provided for teachers–in other words, staff development opportunities for professional growth in teaching and school roles beyond their classroom.

The needs for increased pedagogical expertise and shared leadership in schools arise from the current context of increased scrutiny of school quality and concern for the educational achievement of students. As schools respond to public accountability demands for the outcomes of student learning, school staffs are coming together around innovations and development plans which provide them with the greatest opportunity to improve student learning in an increasingly competitive environment.

This paper examines one particular staff development initiative, the Northwest Initiative for Teaching and Learning (NWIFTL), and the leadership actions which support and sustain the individual school development projects. The Northwest Initiative for Teaching and Learning is a partnership of four Seattle area public school districts, two universities, the State offices of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Commission on Student Learning, and the Stuart Foundation. The initiative funds modest staff development projects[1] in a total of 19 schools across the four partner school districts. The aims of NWIFTL are two fold, not only providing support to schools through grants, but also as an ongoing research effort into the relationship between staff development and improved student learning. Each of the projects are required to demonstrate how teacher collaboration, inquiry, and professional development influence teaching and learning in concert with implementation of state educational reforms.

This study explores the centers of leadership found in these projects. Furthermore, it asks whether these projects reflect traditional principal leadership, or whether they represent a new opportunities for others to participate in meaningful direction of professional development in schools. In addition, this study examines the nature of the leadership provided. In other words, what supports and resources are made available?

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[1] The projects are funded on an annual basis and schools re-apply each spring. Currently, 19 schools are funded, but the number can change from year to year as schools move in and out of the partnership.

The specific research questions of the study are:

- What is the source of leadership for initiation, implementation, and ongoing support of the NWIFTL staff development projects in schools?
- How do principals express leadership in/for the projects?
- Are there characteristics of the NWIFTL project activity which encourage teacher leadership?
- What supports and resources are available to schools for their staff development projects?
- How are supports and resources for the project coordinated?
- What roles do teachers hold in the NWIFTL projects?

Importantly, this study aims to add to a developing understanding of the role of leadership for the purpose of "culture and community building for educational excellence."[2] This is a study-in-progress and, therefore, the discussion represents analysis-in-action and an emerging portrait of leadership for professional development in the schools who are part of this initiative.

Leadership in Staff Development

This study draws upon several theoretical viewpoints on school leadership, instructional leadership roles of principals, and expanded leadership opportunities for teachers. In addition, it is important to consider the context of reform efforts which "bracket" the activities of educators in schools when examining an initiative such as this. Each of the relevant perspectives are discussed in turn for the purpose of grounding the subsequent discussion of the early findings of this study.

Principals and teacher efficacy

The relationship between principal leadership and the instructional effectiveness of teachers in classrooms can be approached in a several ways: Principal leadership as expressed through the process of teacher supervision (Ham & Oja, 1987; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993); as a means of teacher empowerment for their own development (Foster, 1989; Reitzug, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1998); or through the more specific instructional leadership activities of principals in schools (Smith & Andrews, 1989). The latter perspective holds particular currency for one aspect of this study in that it addresses the intersection between principal leadership and the focus of this study– teacher professional development for the purpose of instructional improvement.

Smith and Andrews (1989) propose four key roles that principals engage in for instructional leadership: that of *resource provider*, *instructional resource*, *communicator*, and

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[2] A theme of the UCEA 1998 convention.

visible presence. These four instructional leadership roles are necessarily evolving in concert with macro-changes in the context of the schools principals lead. Through these perspectives, one sees principal instructional leadership as that which supports and highlights effective practice; encouraging individual critical reflection, but not necessarily coupled with the claim of principal-as-pedagogical-exemplar. Similar viewpoints on principal's instructional leadership can be found in Leithwood, Begley and Cousins (1994), particularly their assertion of principals as "key artisans" (p. 5) in the school.

Both of these perspectives emphasize the facilitative role of principals in resource provision and focusing attention on instructional issues whether that be as a "drama coach" in Starratt's "dramaturgical" perspective (Starratt, 1993), or in promoting teacher efficacy (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995; Hipp, 1996), i.e. promoting not only effective practice, but the ability to direct one's own professional learning.

Assuming new roles in teacher leadership

Related to the changes that are occurring in principal roles are new roles for teachers in the leadership activities of the school. By *leadership*, I mean to include those activities of principals and teachers (as well as others) that influence the direction of the school, the formation of its central aims, and support rendered to the ongoing efforts to achieve those aims. Hall and Southworth (1987) note that the division of roles between principal and teachers are softening. As schools become more complex, others besides the principal are needed to assure the ongoing attention to the aims of the school. Research in this state has found that Washington principals report that their job is becoming increasingly onerous (Portin, 1998; Williams & Portin, 1997); as it does, many responsibilities previously held by the principal are being passed on to the teaching staff.

This study aims to cast light on who keeps the interests of these specific staff development projects central in the attention of the school staff. Particularly, I have been curious to examine the roles that teachers are assuming in the ongoing initiation, planning, and implementation of their staff development projects. In other words, have teachers assumed new roles in school-based leadership as a result of this project?

One way that leadership can be exercised in schools is through the notion of an "idea champion." This is similar to Starratt's notion of leadership as a "communal articulation of the vision" (1995, p. 14); a trait he attributes to principal leadership, but could also be applied to teacher leaders. Particularly, in a transformational context, it might be said that any member of the school community can be a force for articulating an idea–a communally agreed idea of central direction.

As schools become more complex Reitzug (1994) calls for empowered schools where, "the locus of control for the *substance* of organizational change shifts from the principal to teachers. This is the type of teacher leadership cited as a "clue" to effective change by Wasley, Hempel, and Clark (1997); teacher leadership built upon the "professional capital" (Sergiovanni, 1998) of the school–the reciprocal responsibility of all professionals for school improvement.

Staff development and centers of reform action

Finally, it is increasingly apparent that the boundaries between school-based development activities and the external policy environment are growing more permeable. Schools often plan for change at the site level in response to desires to improve their own professional expertise and the needs of the students in their community. Simultaneously, however, they must attend to the priorities for reform and improved professional expertise established by school boards, state boards of education, and through legislation. These attentions arise from a number of contexts for school reform and each interact with the professional development activities of the school in differing ways. Male and Merchant (1995) assert that staff development must coordinate these multiple arenas. For this study, exploring the nature of the decisions that school personal are making in the arena of competing, almost paradoxical expectations seems a crucial point to examine.

Methods

Phase 1 data collection

Two phases of data collection have occurred to-date. In the first phase, broad survey data were collected from the project partner schools. The NWIFTL project planning teams[3] from each of the partner schools completed questionnaires at a day-long planning retreat for their school-based projects. Two forms of the survey data were collected. One questionnaire was completed collaboratively by the teams in order to compile general information about the schools' projects, other staff development goals for the year, overall participation in the initiative, and linkages between their NWIFTL project and other staff development efforts in the school. The questionnaire used a combination of scaled response and brief open response items designed to be completed in approximately 30 minutes.

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[3] The project planning teams from each school at a NWIFTL partner school retreat are typically comprised of the principal and 3 teachers. Four staff are always invited to the retreats, but the composition of the actual teams vary in the schools, nor is the principal always an active participant in the project planning team. The NWIFTL Partner School Retreat was held on 2.26.98.

A second individual questionnaire was completed by each team member present. In some cases this included the principal and in others only teachers completed the questionnaire. This questionnaire identified individual perceptions of leadership in the school around the activities of staff development, self assessment of their own and others involvement in the NWIFTL study, perceptions of barriers and enhancing factors to their project, and opportunities provided through the project to extend leadership capacity in the school.

The majority of respondents returned their questionnaires at the meeting, a few were returned by mail, or in response to a follow-up postal request. Response rates are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1
Questionnaire Response Rates

Questionnaire Form	Number	Response Rate
School questionnaires (one per school)	17/19	89%
Individual questionnaires (for each member of the school team in attendance at the partner meeting)	50/60	83%

Phase 2 data collection

To better understand the questionnaire responses, and create an in-depth description of the activities surrounding leadership of the NWIFTL projects, a second phase of data collection was designed. The second phase of the study[4] involves case study research. Two of the partner schools, one elementary and one secondary, were selected through opportunity sampling for an in-depth examination of their NWIFTL projects and the role of leadership in staff development. The schools which agreed to participate, were nominated by the NWIFTL Advisory Board as schools with active projects underway that were predominant parts of the schools on-going staff development efforts. In addition, broad involvement from a principal perceived as effective was deemed to be useful aspect of the site selection. The case study sites incorporate a combination of representativeness of the partner schools, and "ideal types" of schools who, through site visitation and reputation, have active leadership around staff development in the schools.

I recognize the limits of this type of sampling and the potential for interesting lessons to be learned from the range of schools engaged in this staff development effort. However, the range of

[4] This phase is on-going. The elementary case study was completed in the Spring of 1998, and the secondary case study is scheduled for the 1998-99 academic year.

involvement in extensive staff development is represented in the survey data. The case study data represent the experience of two schools[5] perceived as moving forward in staff development. I believe it important to examine the story of "moving" schools in order to understand how a range of schools might marshal resources to enliven their efforts around significant staff development.

Methods used in the case study.

Strategies for data collection (completed in the first case study, planned for the second case study) included interviews with all key leaders in the NWIFTL projects, the principal (regardless of role in the project), and a random sample of teachers. Non-participant observation strategies were used to gather data about how the staff worked together in staff development activities, the role of individual staff members, and the professional development culture of the school. Finally, relevant documents associated with the school's NWIFTL project and other staff development activities were collected. Content analysis of interview, open-response questionnaire data (from phase 1), and documents was conducted using a modified grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Descriptive statistical summaries were prepared for scaled response questionnaire data using SPSS.

Findings

As noted, this study is on-going. The findings of the study presented here represent analysis of data from the first phase (survey research) and the elementary case study in the second phase.

Major themes from the survey of the partner schools

All 17 of the responding schools indicated staff development efforts were underway in their school beyond the projects identified as part of their NWIFTL grant. School-based plans were shaped by a combination of building, district, and state decisions and directives. The largest category of staff development projects beyond the NWIFTL projects included those associated with the comprehensive state reforms underway in Washington. As student performance on state assessments becomes publicized, schools, and districts are developing focused plans aimed at addressing identified weaknesses indicated on state tests. The content areas of focus cited most often were mathematics and written language. In addition, technology was indicated as being a major focus as were issues surrounding full inclusion of students with special educational needs.

The responding schools indicated that their NWIFTL projects were linked to many other staff development efforts in the school. The form of this linkage was indicated as being in the form

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[5] One case study was completed during the 1997-98 academic year. The second case study is planned for the 1998-99 academic year.

of resources provided (time, consultants, and focus) to the range of staff development activities in schools.

When asked to indicate what supports were available from the school district for the school's NWIFTL project, the three most frequently cited supports were release time to work on the project and the project aims, "encouragement" for the school-based efforts from central administration, and providing support through coordination and the supply of trainers/expertise from the central office and in some cases from other schools in the district. Both district schools and central office were seen as potential and actual sources of support.

Respondents were asked to indicate what supports from the principal and/or building resources were provided for the NWIFTL project. Particularly, respondents were to identify those resources beyond the NWIFTL grant and partner school support activities. Three major categories emerged with the highest frequency. The most cited support from the building principal was her or his use of building resources to provide release time for project planning and activities. In the majority of cases, the principal was at least a part of the planning committee, and three schools indicated the principal as the primary facilitator of the project. As with district supports, encouragement from the principal was seen as a primary support. The third category was linked specifically to financial resources with ten schools indicating the principal allocated other building funds to the NWIFTL project. In addition, six schools indicated the principal's expertise in acquiring other grants was a support to their staff development effort.

The individual questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the degree of involvement from various categories of individuals and groups that interact with the day-to-day life of the school. The purpose of the question was to find out who is involved and to what degree are they involved in the school's NWIFTL project. The mean for each category provided by the 50 respondents to the individual questionnaire is presented in Table 2 in rank order from "highly involved" to "not involved."

Table 2

Degree of Involvement by Categories of Individuals/Groups in School's NWIFTL Project

Individual/Group	Mean 1=not involved; 2=somewhat involved; 3=involved; 4=highly involved; 5=very highly involved
teaching staff at-large	3.96
principal	3.66
department heads	3.45
students	3.41
assistant principal	3.40
other building administrators	3.16
"SLIG" committee (site committees required by state for oversight of block grant funds for reform implementation)	2.93
school site council	2.52
union representatives	2.18
other	2.10
classified staff	1.88
other parents or community	1.62
PTSA	1.61

Respondents to the individual questionnaire were asked in open-ended format to indicate what they perceived to be enhancing factors to their staff development project. The most often cited factors were a mixture of person-oriented supports and task oriented resources. The respondents spoke in various ways about the notion of an "idea champion", someone who promoted the idea of the project and kept it in the forefront of their school considerations. Additionally, the concept of "critical friends" has been a feature of the NWIFTL training and partner meetings. The respondents indicated that having reflective colleagues, both in and out of the school, was a support to their thinking and growth around their project. In terms of task-oriented resources, time was the most often cited resource. Also the financial and training resources provided by the initiative were seen as a major category of enhancing factors.

Barriers noted by respondents also fell into the two categories of person-oriented and task-oriented. Time and a feeling of being "overloaded" were the most often cited. Respondents indicated that a multiplicity of demands, both internal and external to the school, were hindering their efforts. In addition, some respondents indicated that it seemed that their site-based efforts were occasionally superseded by district mandates in compliance with unfolding state education

reform (e.g., curricular direction change as a result of district performance on the state assessments). Several respondents also indicated that a lack of staff cohesion around the central aims of the project were a barrier to their progress.

A final area of inquiry in the questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate their perceptions of the effect on leadership from the NWIFTL project and where they perceived the center of leadership support existed. The response means for the four questions associated with this topic of effect on leadership are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Perception of Project Effect on Leadership for Staff Development

	Mean (1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=undecided; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree)
Leadership in staff development has been assumed by more staff as a result of the NWIFTL project.	1.80
I have taken a more active leadership role in staff development as a result of the NWIFTL project.	1.66
Other staff development projects (not NWIFTL) have encouraged more leadership in our school.	2.74
The principal has provided the most support for our NWIFTL project progress.	2.76

Major themes from the elementary case study

The case study phase of this research is on-going through the 1998-99 school year. As a result, the following are preliminary findings and are limited to the first case study of an elementary school. There are three themes that appear predominant from content analysis of the interview transcripts, observational fieldnotes, and site documents. Each are summarized in turn.

Principal leadership as facilitator of teacher professional development.

The first major theme encompasses the nature of how the principal's leadership interacts with the professional development culture of the school. The principal's leadership was unanimously supported by all of the interviewees in this case study. Teachers described the nature of the principal's leadership in initiation and on-going support of the staff development activities of the school. The principal was described as the initiator of this school's central focus on process-based collaborative techniques (as a new school, the school's initial focus has been under the

direction and initiation of the principal). Teachers described various ways that the principal modeled the collegial strategies of their staff development project, provided the resources to ensure a long term commitment to implementing their project, as well as the *interpretive role* the principal has played in identifying how the central characteristics of their project might be linked to district and state curricular mandates.

The principal's espoused leadership values include support of teachers in their instructional role, asking questions to stimulate new ideas, verifying clear thinking in staff decision making, embedding the central values of the school, assuring extensive buy-in and ownership of the school's professional development focus, and the guiding the school in consequential decisions through broad based decision-making by the staff.

Teacher leadership as an embedded cultural norm.

In this school, all interviewees spoke of the unwritten expectation for everyone to be involved in planning and implementation of various aspects of staff development. Although not explicit, everyone interviewed spoke of the felt obligation to be on at least one committee. There appeared to be a norm of involvement in the professional activities of the school.

This may be linked to the principal's espoused leadership value of eliciting partnership in the ownership of the school through participation from staff in the consequential decisions of the school. When a difficult decisions arises, the principal enlists the staff to "worry the problem" through a collaborative and collective decision making process. Teachers in this school appear to be used to making decisions and have been provided the latitude and resources to develop their own ideas. Teachers noted that if a new idea was generated, it was up to those interested to shoulder the work to explore and initiate the planning process.

Nature of the links between staff development activities and espoused leadership practices.

The third major category that emerged from these data is one that links leadership practices and the staff development activities of the school. A theme that runs through a number of views expressed in this school is one of "embeddedness". Owing to a perceived avalanche of demands on schools in today's reform environment, the ability to combine efforts, to reduce time demands, and to link teaching, teacher development, and the overall culture of the school appears to be a central leadership aim. In this school, the staff development goals of collaboration through the process of "cognitive coaching" (Costa & Garmston, 1994) are combined with classroom plans for teaching problem solving in mathematics. Funding for staff development comes from multiple sources, and resources are leveraged in order to accomplish multiple aims.

In addition, when considering the leadership and management of the school, the principal has promoted and modeled the use of coaching strategies to solve substantive problems. This

action has formed links between the staff development direction of the school and the leadership and management of the school.

Implications

Context is an important shaping element of staff development

Schools in Washington state, as in other states, are suffering from "innovation overload." The data from both phases of this study indicate that teachers perceive their jobs as continually operating on the edge of what is possible. This is most often articulated in response to educational reform in Washington State which has shaped content, pedagogy, and assessment practices in every public school. As a result, the NWIFTL projects have the potential for being perceived as "just one more thing to do." To counter this, an important role for school leaders (teachers or principals) is a clear understanding of the state and district directions which shape the activities of schools, as well as a firm grasp on the agreed aims of the school.

Schools exist in an environment that links their actions to internal planning as well as what it means to be part of an educational system (be that district or state). Data from this study reveal that schools involved in this professional development activity are aware of these links and that they have the potential to be perceived as both barriers and enhancing factors for school growth.

Broad-based leadership for staff development

From these initial findings, it appears that leadership is not only important for the progress of staff development (such as those funded through this initiative), but that the leadership draws upon known characteristics of effective school administration and is inclusive in its operation. Leadership, as vested in the apparent or implicit leadership structure of the school, appears to be crucial for the on-going success of the initiative projects.

No single leadership model is apparent; however, even when teachers are in primary leadership roles the assent of the principal appears to be a necessary attribute of project success. The model of project leadership varies from primarily principal-directed to oversight by a team of teachers. What seems to be apparent, however, is that the principal must play a supportive role even if responsibility has been delegated.

Although a breadth of leadership activities is revealed, they generally cluster around the four characteristics of instructional leadership outlined by Smith and Andrews (1989). For principal leadership, the role of "resource provider" is particularly important. The ability of the principal to bring other school resources to bear on a project direction, as well as acquiring outside sources of funding and expertise, seem crucial to the ongoing success of these projects.

One implication that develops from this study surrounds differentiated staffing models which may help address increased demands on schools. Whether or not this study will identify

some type of differentiated staffing (for the purpose of leadership) as influenced by the NWIFTL projects is too early to tell. Further analysis will be necessary to address the importance of this question. What is clear, however, is that principals increasingly find themselves in a time of role overload owing to the mounting responsibilities being delegated to schools. There is, perhaps, an opportunity in this study to see how one school development model is contributing to the increased capacity of the school for leadership in this domain.

Linking leadership

In a context of multiple demands, it appears that an important activity of leaders (principal or teacher) is the ability to frame the development activities of the school in a way that organizes efforts. This suggests a theme related to the "bridging" roles (Goldring, 1990) that principals play in responding to district and state expectations for change. The alignment of the initiative with on-going improvement and staff development efforts was reported as a strength of many of the NWIFTL projects. These projects do not stand alone, but have many reported links to other aims and efforts. The notion of linkage seems crucial for the successful leadership of these projects. Regardless of who is providing the primary support, leaders re-interpret the NWIFTL project to serve more than one purpose in the school. In the case of schools in this project, it was often seen as a means for implementing and preparing for state reform. In other words, the initiative projects act as a "carrier wave" for other efforts.

The findings from this study are important for a number of reasons. While the idea of site-based responsibility for school reform continues to grow, it does so in a policy environment which seems to reflect an increasing centralization of the authority for certain aims and functions of schooling. This paradoxical leadership environment (Grace, 1995) presents a challenge to understanding how principal and/or teacher leadership is expressed. When considering needs for increased professional capacity (in ways these school-based professional development projects address), it is important to further understand this paradox and how, nevertheless, leadership must be negotiated at the building level.

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